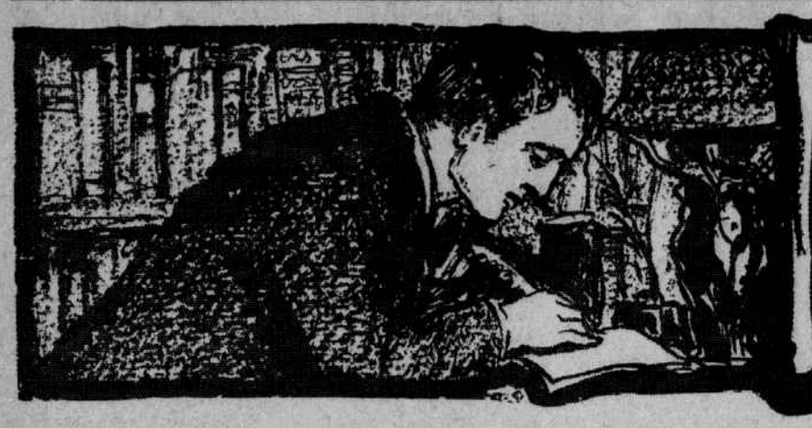


BOOKS

Fifty-nine kinds of sense and fun

WELL, WHY NOT? By Thomas L. Masson. Doubleday, Page & Co.

THIS collection is rather an assorted lot of Mr. Masson's contributions to the general stock of cheerfulness in the United States. There are fifty-nine separate pieces besides the "Prologue to the Foreword" and the "Foreword to the Introduction to the Preface" and the "Introduction to the Preface" and the "Preface" with its "Postscript," not to speak of "A Few Remarks" about the author by the Lady Cook of his household, who is, we gather, the most "distinguished" person whom he could prevail on to write something to hang up over the entrance to his book, like an Abracadabra, or a Mazuza, or a horseshoe, to avert bad luck from his venture.

Now, just why Mr. Masson suffered such a *crise de nerf* as he evidently did in thinking it necessary or expedient to make such an elaborate feint at jocosity as all this preliminary canter indicates at the beginning of his book is one of the inexplicable mishaps which befall a writer, however gifted, when faced with a formidable pile of his own short pieces, which he has got tired of, and realizes that they are to be offered to the public in a book as merchantable material. He has no more accurate judgment about them than a cat in a cat's cradle could have about the day after tomorrow; and such an animal, we submit, never was on land or sea. So we must forgive all the stuttering start and be glad of the book for itself.

For it, as Gilbert once said of life (the mortal estate, not the periodical) is a pudding full of plums. There is no propriety (nor space for it) in giving a string of titles of the most amusing pieces in the book. But this one thing seems to be true—that the moral tale of "The Man Who Came Back" provides a good and sufficient and comprehensive explanation of Mr. Masson's complete capacity as the editor of *Life*—the periodical—for twenty years. For in it he has conveyed with the utmost clearness the supreme importance to every man of keeping life in his own body until he is quite ready to disappear, kerplunk and forever, in the deep pool of oblivion.

In this story we read that Henry Bilkins, a man who had been in his life much loved and respected round about, had found out, through the activities of the Society for Psychical Research, that he *could* come back after having been dead and honorably buried for ten years. He thought they would all be glad to see him back here, so back he came. He called on his son, to whom he had left his money. He was a bit embarrassed, but filial and respectful, lent him a hundred dollars and suggested that the father should wait a day or two before calling upon his widow. Mr. Bilkins discovered shortly that the lady had married again and was very contented. He hunted up various and sundry of his old friends and tried to make golf engagements with them, but they all had other engagements.

Now, there isn't anything bitter in this little tale—not a thing. But it contains inherent evidence of Mr. Masson's possession of a most competent and earth-shaking sense of humor, in that he perceives the inevitable joke which a man gets played on him as an individual, so far as life goes, when he once lets go and slips out of his place in the world, or in society, or in his own circle, or whatever you like. This Mr. Bilkins had been in life an admirable character, and Mr. Masson crowns him with great glory in attributing to him the ability to see the joke as it exists and to accept the fact without resentment, but with full recognition of the complete finality of demise as accepted by regretful family and friends. Here endeth the lesson. Q. E. D.

There is "much wisdom in little room" in the remarks upon "Egotism," which, Mr. Masson says, is also known under the names of "Vanity" and "Conceit." But by any name it is "a source of unalloyed happiness to itself." Solomon drove Vanity to the woods with his reproaches, so that she has never been the same since, though Egotism and Conceit have tried hard to rehabilitate her. And as to the egotist—"the serenity with which he ignores his own mistakes is equalled by no philosopher. . . . He needs no merit. . . . He lives by faith alone—faith in the one person in whom he has the utmost confidence—himself."

Mr. Masson writes feelingly "On Spending One's Money," visualizing with perspicacity one's friend A. who pinches and scrapes the whole kernel out of whatever nut he gets into his paws, and friend B. who chucks his money around as if it grew wild in the back yard, and whose family all do the same. One meditates upon their habits with wonder, and indulges oneself alternately in inexcusable extravagances and miserable petty economies; altogether, "spending one's money is largely a matter of one's worldly imagination."

Mr. Masson writes with gallantry about "Book Reviewers." He says: "I am positive that book reviewers as a class are wholly misunderstood. Their nice sense of honor prevents them from associating with authors whose books they review, their relationships being with people of a lower order, such as publishers and editors. . . . It is not the province of book reviewers to tell what is in a book; if they did this there would be no use in reading it. . . . The majority of book reviewers are not only very much alive, but extremely conscientious, within their lights. . . . They should be segregated, fed upon simple but nourishing food, and after passing examinations be provided with book reviewers' licenses."

All this, and much more of good humored, intelligent and encouraging chaff of a discriminating sort, in this latest addition to the author's long docket of proven books. He has got off pretty easily, heretofore, in the court of public opinion. He is likely to be as lucky this time. "Well, why not?"

Two plays by Eugene O'Neill which have been seen on the stage and one that will be presented in the fall are published in a single volume, on tragic themes but giving hope that this playwright may escape drowning in a sea of pessimism

THE EMPEROR JONES; DIFF'RENT; THE STRAW. By Eugene O'Neill. Boni & Liveright.

THE reader who cherishes the delusion that there is a sun and furthermore that it shines now and then will catch at O'Neill's "Straw" for support in his absurdly optimistic view of life on the tragic planet. For though "The Straw" shows the winds of hope and love blowing through a sanitarium, hope and love are unmistakably there. A young writer, touched with disease, meets a girl who is in a much worse case. He recovers and later returns to find her in a crisis. She loves him and has evidently been clinging to the faint hope that his heart is not unresponsive. When the young man realizes the situation, at first he decides to act out of pity. But as he turns from his own selfish plans to put himself in her place, a deeper experience comes to him. To turn her mind from her own case he pretends that he has fallen again a victim. He says to the nurse:

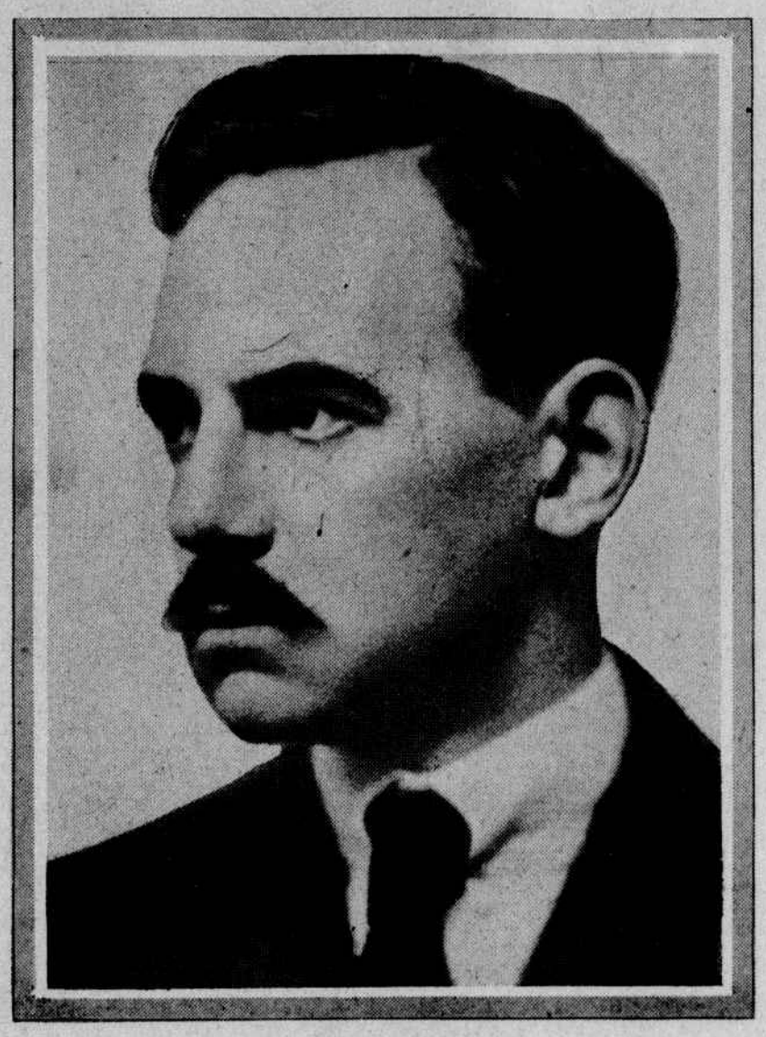
"She must marry me at once and I will take her away—the Far West—any place Stanton thinks can help. And she can take care of me—as she thinks—and I know she will grow well as I seem to grow well. Oh Miss Gilpin, don't you see? No half and half measures—no promises—no conditional engagements—can help us—help her. We love too much! (*Fiercely as if defying her.*) But we'll win together. We can! We must! There are things you doctors cannot value—cannot know the strength of! (*Exultantly.*) You'll see! I'll make Eileen get well, I tell you! Happiness will cure! Love is stronger than—— (*He suddenly breaks down before the pitying negation she cannot keep from her eyes. He sinks on a chair shoulders bowed, face hidden in his hands, with a groan of despair.*) Oh, why did you give me a hopeless hope?"

"MISS GILPIN: Isn't everything we know—just that—when you think of it? (*Her face lighting up with a consoling revelation.*) But there must be something back of it—some promise of fulfilment—somehow—somewhere—in the spirit of hope itself.

"MURRAY: (*Dully.*) Yes—but what do words mean to me now? (*Then suddenly starting to his feet and flinging off her hand with disdainful strength—violently and almost insultingly.*) What rot! I tell you we'll win! We must! Oh, I'm a fool to waste words on you! What can you know? Love isn't in the materia medica. Your predictions—all the verdicts of all the doctors—what do they matter to me? This is—beyond you! And we'll win in spite of you! (*Scornfully.*) How dare you use the word 'hopeless'—as if it were the last! Come now, confess. There's always hope, isn't there? What do you *know*? Can you say you *know* anything?"

"MISS GILPIN: (*Taken aback by his violence for a moment, finally bursts into a laugh of helplessness which is close to tears.*) I? I know nothing—absolutely nothing! God bless you both!"

This play is issued in book form before its presentation on the stage, which is announced for the autumn. The other two plays have already been placed before the public, visibly and audibly. Both are tragic. "The Emperor Jones" is one of those rare stage vehicles that acts itself in the reader's mind. It should hold its own as literature.



Eugene O'Neill.

Whatever be the reason, this expression of fear comes nearer producing the classic mood of pity and terror defined by the Greek philosopher than any of O'Neill's other works. One is not stirred to that resentment felt at the close of "Beyond the Horizon." For brief as it is there is a kind of completeness and balance about "The Emperor Jones." The man's whole life is presented as in a judgment day review—and he himself is judge, jury and prisoner at the bar.

It is worth while to give some of the stage directions, which justify themselves as good writing and put the reader in the position of spectator. Here is the word-painting of the stage for scene two, scene three and scene four:

"Nightfall. The end of the plain where the great forest begins. The foreground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes cowering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A sombre monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence."

. . . . .

"Nine o'clock. In the forest. The moon has just risen. Its beams, drifting through the canopy of leaves, make a barely perceptible, suffused, eerie glow. A dense low wall of underbrush and creepers is in the nearer foreground, fencing in a small triangular clearing. Beyond this is the massed blackness of the forest like an encompassing barrier. A path is dimly discerned leading down to the clearing from left, rear, and winding away from it again toward the right. As the scene opens nothing can be distinctly made out. Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than in the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound. Then gradually the figure of the negro, Jeff, can be discerned crouching on his haunches at the rear of the triangle. He is middle aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform, cap, &c. He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton. The heavy, plodding footsteps of some one approaching along the trail from the left are heard, and Jones's voice, pitched in a slightly higher key and strained in a cheering effort to overcome its own tremors."

. . . .

"Eleven o'clock. In the forest. A wide dirt road runs diagonally from right, front, to left, rear. Rising sheer on both sides the forest walls it in. The moon is now up. Under its light the road glimmers ghastly and unreal. It is as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose. This done, the forest will fold in upon itself again and the road will be no more. Jones stumbles in from the forest on the right. His uniform is ragged and torn. He looks about him with numbed surprise when he sees the road, his eyes blinking in the bright moonlight."

The playwright of power and skill is rare enough to be welcome among the makers of books as well as in the theatre. O'Neill is among the few. His work so far presents a narrow and painful view of life. Maybe some day he will hear Beethoven's Ninth symphony and realize that there is nothing necessarily superficial or inartistic in joy. Beethoven knew quite as much about pain as any modern realist. But that was not all he knew.

Daybreak Song in old Savannah

By RALPH M. THOMSON.

DAYBREAK and promise; night
is almost done;
Out of the darkness of the eastern sky
The morning star, forerunner of the sun,
Signals the world; the far, prophetic cry
Of watchful gulls is echoed through the still,
Dense wilderness of marshes; restlessly,
Like children half asleep, each briny rill
Tosses in its soft bed; in youthful glee
The winds and wavelets dance a sarabband
On polished shores, smoothed by the ebbing tide;
To music played by conch shells on the strand
The palms intone their madrigals; the pied
And lowly fiddlers from their mud cots crawl;
The white cranes hasten to their sand bar trysts;
Sparrows and marsh hens answer Heaven's call;
And—life's transfigured with the melting mists.

Daybreak and promise; night is all but past;
A rosy glow of hope lights up the main
And thrills the earth with radiant joy at last.
Awake, my heart, you have not dreamed in vain!

British leader discusses mines

NATIONALIZATION OF THE MINES. By Frank Hodges. Thomas Seltzer.

FRANK HODGES, who has been playing a leading role in the British miners' strike threat, wrote this book last year while secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. He states that the only way to save the coal industry is for the Government to take it over, compensate the shareholders and let the workers run the industry themselves.

Mr. Hodges claims that nationalization alone will reduce the cost of production, benefit both the public and the workers and maintain the wellbeing of the dependent industries.

"The industry has arrived at a stage when, were it not for the fact of the sensational export prices, it would, owing to high labor costs and deficiencies in technical equipment, be a burden on the nation." Let the taxpayers pay for the operation, he says, for the underlying principle of nationalization is to benefit the whole community.

Competitive wastes would be wiped out in buying, producing, distributing and selling. Acknowledging that governmental ownership of coal would give the Government new political power, Mr. Hodges anticipates the criticism that the raising of price to any country might be regarded as an act of hostility. No; he would place full responsibility in a national corporation which would not be subject to political considerations.

Two other objections are taken up: That individual initiative would be destroyed and that the Government would trespass beyond the bounds of its proper office of governing. To the first he replies that the lure of money does not provide initiative; what the worker wants is to be a human being above everything else. Such an impartial observer as Whiting Williams has made the same report in "What's on the Worker's Mind." Self-expression, interest in life, interest in work—these are the spurs of initiative.

To the objection that the Government has no right to engage in production Mr. Hodges replies: "It is indeed a thin philosophy which declares that a government has no right to do this or that, when it is the people themselves composing the state who are the arbiters of what is or what is not right." But by nationalization he does not mean administration by unfit politicians; let those who are actually working in the industry remain. Let there be a national mining council composed of men of technical and practical knowledge. Let there be a system of self-government.

Mr. Hodges writes his brief exposition lucidly and with a cool head. His sincerity is not to be doubted. Surely, he is thinking along the channels of human happiness. But whether the defects of the present system are impossible of eradication without nationalization is still a moot question. Labor costs have been lowered since his writing, technical deficiencies may be overcome, and cooperation and sensible thinking among the present owners may avert the avoidable wastes of competition. Honorable treatment of the workers is another factor.

If nationalization cannot better conditions of life, private ownership must come forward with a mitigating plan of its own.

New international play anthology holds the mirror up to moderns

CHIEF CONTEMPORARY DRAMATISTS, SECOND SERIES. Edited by Thomas H. Dickenson, Ph. D. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Reviewed by ELEANOR HAYDEN.

THIS companion volume to Prof. Dickenson's first anthology of contemporary plays supplements and completes the earlier work. In glancing through the new series, excellent as is the collection of dramatists and interesting as is the material offered, there is the usual temptation, when considering a collection, to transpose, omit and include certain plays. For instance, there is a strong feeling that Cyrano de Bergerac belongs in the first series and that Rostand should stand with Brieux and Tchekhov in the earlier book.

Together the two volumes make a splendid contemporary background, though the newest bit of the new day in America is still to be served, since Prof. Dickenson chooses as his one play that is strictly American in content by an American "The Easiest Way." Though the anthology cannot be called strictly modern until some attention is given and some representation is made of what such younger American playwrights as those in the Provincetown group are achieving, the collection is an adequate one, including plays by Maugham, Drinkwater, Ervine, Dunsany, Bennett, Schnitzler, Guitry and Gorki.

The American representation is weak. Out of eighteen plays only four can in any way be claimed as American contributions. Hazelton and Benrimo, two native sons, collaborated on that irresistible play "The Yellow Jacket." Josephine Preston Peabody is the author of "The Piper." Knoblock, born in New York, but since become a naturalized citizen of Great Britain, collaborated with Bennett on "Milestones," and, of course, Eugene Walter is strictly American. For the rest the collection includes English and Irish playwrights as well as contemporary Continental successes.

Among a reader's impressions, striking things stand out. Though Prof. Dickenson in his introduction suggests that the thesis or problem play is less in evidence than in the earlier work, surely "Mixed Marriage," "Morals of Ludwig Thoma" and "The Lower Depths" pose, concretely or by implication, as definite problems as one could wish. Another impression one gains from this new collection is that the play of ideas is much stronger on the printed page than the play of emotion. "Gioconda" of d'Annunzio without a Duse falls far short of the effect produced, for instance, by such an entirely different type of play as "Milestones." The long, elaborate speeches in the d'Annunzio piece fail to make themselves convincing.

This is in immediate contrast with Bahr's delightful version of the same theme—the difficulties resulting from the attempts of feminine and domestic women to cope with the artistic temperament in their husbands. Artists have a hard enough time anywhere, but at the hands of the dramatist they receive particularly rough treatment. Never a sculptor but has his domestic peace shattered by an unfeeling playwright who scatters bewildering sirens about the studio with a sort of "Be strong if you dare!" air. What can the sculptors do but fail? Usually their marble masterpieces fall also with a crash, on or off stage, either before or after their own debacle.

Hermann Bahr with his temperamental musician has fewer crashes, emotional or otherwise. He treats the subject in a much lighter vein. While d'Annunzio's outraged wife and brazen rival are fighting the thing out on the old lines if it takes all summer, Bahr's women discuss the delicate matter casually and agree to a legal transposition of husbands as a pleasant variation from the monotony on one hand and uncertainty on the other of their previous home lives. The artist's wife confesses artlessly to being a bit bored with his erratic disposition, his tiresome lovesick pupils, the continuing necessity of seeing that his disposition isn't ruffled by breakfasting alone and other such insignificant and potent details. Bayard Quincy Morgan, has done an extremely deft piece of work in preserving the lightness, the flavor of the original, in English.

The Bennett-Knoblock play (by the way, one learns from the anthology that the august Arnold's name is also Enoch) is a delight. "Milestones" depicts in three acts three different generations. In the first the players are young, with enthusiasm for radical ideas, which at the time happen to be concerned with the building of iron ships. In the next act the molten hot enthusiasm of youth cools—hardens in the now middle aged people. The advocate of iron ships, now a man of affairs and influence, poohpoohs the next generation with its talk of steel ships. And in turn that younger generation ages, while a third set of youngsters demand their moments.

"If you hadn't been born in the right bedroom you might have been a billiard marker," caustically remarks an irate relative, who has married into the Gibley family, to young Lord Monkhurst. The Hon. Muriel Pym demands of her crystallized and conventionalized mother: "Hasn't it occurred to you, even yet, that the aristocracy racket's played out?"

The guardian of a daughter's happiness, who has once been fiery in demand for the new, pronounces on an impossible suitor, even though he is a genius, the following judgment:

"And what if he is? Are geniuses to be the kings of the earth? Not quite! Geniuses have to be kept in order like criminals. If there's one thing above all to be said in favor of the English character it is that we've known the proper way to treat geniuses."

The Drinkwater "Lincoln" is already familiar to most Americans, and a previous reading makes Frank McGlynn's marvellous presentation of the role doubly enjoyable. The play undoubtedly had to be written by an Englishman with perspective, and, fortunately, as played, the few unfortunate phrases are changed. The black minister no longer talks like a Fiji Islander, "Black, black, white, white," and Gen. Grant no longer remarks testily: "Where the deuce is my hat?" Such minor, insignificant details do not matter, since Mr. Drinkwater, while missing out now and then on the interpretation of the letter of the characters, has caught unquestionably and unforgettably the eternal spirit of the great emancipator.

"King Argimenes," the Dunsany selection, is less compelling than "The Gods of the Mountain" or even than "The Laughter of the Gods."

To one who was being taken to see "Peter Pan" when "The Easiest Way" was produced, a reading of it now seems strangely like reading a last year's yellow newspaper (yellow meaning old—not lurid). The movies have taken most of the pathos out of the more sinned against than sinning Lauras and the cynical movie fans will fail to be moved by the 1908 version of the problem. The cinema has taught us for so long that virtue is rewarded, that all women are beautiful, all men brave, and that the wicked villainess is always foiled in her attempt to be wicked and left miserable at the end that any one trying to get up any sympathy for the erring sister has a hard time in this filmed shock proof day and generation.

Mrs. Marks's "The Piper" is always charming and a pleasure to reread. Her artistic propaganda against cruelty, selfishness and greed and her picture of the reawakening of the desolate town when the children and love and laughter are piped back into it is a satisfying thing to remember.

Georges de Porto-Riche and Gunnar Heiberg give their respective interpretations of what occurs in households where "L'Amoureuse," "The Loving Wife," loves her husband not wisely but too well. The Frenchman, Porto-Riche, restores happiness by restoring interest in the household after a slight infidelity of "L'Amoureuse." Heiberg, with a cold, northern brutality, in "The Tragedy of Love," makes the wife confess to an uncommitted infidelity, and, seeing that even that fails to have any effect, kill herself behind a curtain. Both plays might act better before a Continental audience than they read in America, where the taste for this type of thing is, again, not cultivated by movies. A play of the same sort of drawing room melodrama that seems more significant than either of these plays is that Continental offering given in New York this winter at special matinees as "The White Villa."

Jacinto Benavente and his Commedia dell' Arte Harlequin, Columbine Polinchinelle "Bonds of Interest" is consistently amusing.

One wonders why "Living Hours" was selected to represent Schnitzler. Of the reason for including "The Lower Depths" there is no question. Were one of our light and less respectful magazines that frivol about the serious side of life endeavor to jest about the unmitigated, unrelieved, sordid tragedy and horror that Russians can depict there are whole scenes to be lifted straight from the text. One would doubt if even Russians could be quite so overwhelmed by the oppression of the world until one read again the original version.

The power of Gorky is unmistakable. He makes one of his characters, even after degrading acts have followed one another, demand respect for mankind rather than pity or compassion. It is an amazing thing that contemporary human minds, living on this planet, can conceive two pieces of writing, both inevitably called "plays," of such endlessly separated import as "Pollyanna" and "The Lower Depths." Bizarre, ridiculous it is that "play" must apply to both. And yet one intelligent and sympathetic comment made by a playwright after seeing "Pollyanna" might also apply to "The Lower Depths." He felt "a great pity for the audience that there should be so little color, so little meaning in their lives, that they should take that as all." Couldn't the same pity be felt for those who see "The Lower Depths" as all?